

Computing Educators Oral History Project
Practice interview transcript

Wanda Dann

Interviewer: Nell Dale

Recorded Sunday, June 26, 2005

Location: Lisbon, Portugal

Corresponding audio available on CEOHP's website, ceohp.org, under "Short Practice Interviews".

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Conducted as a training session during the ITiCSE 2005 Working Group meeting in Lisbon, Portugal.

1 [0:00]

2 **Nell Dale: Today is June the 26th, 2005, Lisbon, Portugal. I'm Nell Dale, interviewing**
3 **Wanda Dann of Ithaca College, Ithaca, New York. Wanda, why don't we start by your**
4 **telling me a little bit about your early childhood and your family?**

5

6 Wanda Dann: I grew up in the suburbs of Charleston, West Virginia, a coal mining area. My
7 father was a worker in a factory. My mother was a nurse and we had very little, financially.
8 In fact, growing up I had always thought that I had lived in poverty. {part omitted}

9

10 **N: Did you start out majoring in science and mathematics?**

11

12 W: Yes, I began as what was called a medical technology major and I had a scholarship. And I
13 worked in the hospital three days one week and four days the next week and took a full-time
14 load. And that helped pay my tuition. Whatever I earned at the hospital was matched by the
15 college. So the good thing about that was that I was able to go to college because my parents
16 couldn't afford to pay for it. The bad part about that was that, in working in the hospital, I

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17 realized that being a medical technology major was not what I wanted to do. Perhaps that
18 was a good thing, on reflection.

19
20 I changed to a chemistry major and took a position as a TA in the lab. And then realized with
21 the TA position that I very much enjoyed the teaching side and so changed my major to
22 secondary education with a dual teaching emphasis -- chemistry and mathematics.

23

24 **N: At what point did you decide to go on to graduate school?**

25

26 W: Well, I got a teaching certificate. We moved to New York. And I got a teaching certificate in
27 New York and in New York state it was a temporary teaching certificate because you needed
28 to have 30 credit hours graduate level or you needed to have a Master's degree. Returned to
29 grad school to maintain that certificate, to get permanent certification.

30

31 **N: Were you doing it in chemistry?**

32

33 W: I was doing it in chemistry, yes. And so I went to Colgate. Of course, then I had two children.
34 And over several years' time, I had two children, I taught high school. I taught high school
35 chemistry, I became science department chair. I gradually managed to get my degree in
36 chemistry, and a Master's degree in teaching.

37

38 **N: What then led you into computing?**

39

40 W: In the process of doing my Master's degree at Colgate I needed to analyze data that I was
41 collecting for my Master's thesis and my advisor sent me to the computer lab to work with a
42 statistics package on a VAX. So that was my introduction to computing. I essentially took
43 my data and learned how to use data entry methods to enter my data. [I] discovered that the
44 program was not working the way it should work and in terms of some discussions with the
45 people who were the programmers and the managers of the IT system there (although it
46 wasn't called IT then) discovered that I had insights as to how the program should be written
47 that they didn't know and they suggested that I might be interested in taking a couple of
48 courses in computing.

49

50 So after I finished my Master's degree (I waited a couple of years until my family situation
51 had stabilized and my children were in school), I took a few extra hours now and then and
52 went to take computing courses. My first course was in BASIC.

53

54 **N: And you became hooked on it or ...?**

55

56 W: I did. I enjoyed it so much. It was obviously my thing. I felt the connection to the technology,
57 the problem solving that was there. I thought perhaps I could write programs that would be
58 used for helping me to teach high school students and I did. And then I began taking
59 additional courses. One of the courses I took very quickly was in FORTRAN. And then I
60 took Pascal and that opened a whole world for me and the school that I went to gave me an
61 opportunity to just build on the degrees I already had to get a Master's degree in computer
62 science. A couple of years into working on a Master's degree in computer science, a nearby

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63 college called me and asked me if I would be willing to come in to their campus. They
64 essentially hired me right from high school, "Come and teach at our college, we want you to
65 do curriculum development, a new computing curriculum for our college."
66

67 **N: So you made the transition from high school to college because someone came to you ...?**

68

69 W: Yes.

70

71 **N: ... not ...**

72 **[6:19]**